

## Young Consumers' Expectation, Perceived Performance and Disconfirmation towards SMEs Halal Food Products in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** In tandem with the global growth of the halal industry, abundant choices of halal food products are expected to be available in the market. Therefore, in order to be dominant and able to compete with other brands in the halal marketplace, domestic halal food producers need to revise their strategies and produce superior products that will be able to meet Muslim consumer's increasing expectation on halal food products. In order to find out the extent to which consumers' expectation towards halal food product has been met, expectancy-disconfirmation theory (EDT) was utilized in this study. Halal confectionery products produced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were chosen as the product of analysis. Questionnaires consisted of 45 determinants measuring expectation and perceived performance were then administered using purposive sampling within young Muslim consumers in Klang Valley area. A total of 390 usable questionnaire forms were collected and subjected to data analysis. The finding revealed that all the attributes listed experienced negative disconfirmation, which point toward the conclusion that SMEs halal confectionery products are unable to meet consumers' expectation. This study will broaden the insights of halal food manufacturers and related parties in understanding Muslim consumer preferences in halal food products.

**Keywords** - consumer satisfaction, expectation, Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT, halal food, SME

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### I. Introduction

The basic pattern of Muslim dietary laws is based on the prohibition of some foods and the promotion of others. In Islam, the acceptable foods and drinks are referred as halal, meaning lawful, while prohibited products are called haram. All foods that are pure and clean are permitted for consumption except for swine, blood, animals slaughtered not following the Islamic rites, food that has been dedicated or immolated to someone other than Allah, alcohol, intoxicants, carnivorous animals, birds of prey as well as any products derived from them or contaminated with the mentioned items [1]. Nevertheless, halal is more than not consuming products containing pork, intoxicant or any restricted substances. As a Muslim, there must be an effort from each individual to make a wise decision and only consume good and wholesome food.

In the recent years, driven by the growing demand of halal products and services from more than 1.6 billion of Muslims across the globe, the halal market has experienced considerable growth and development. Aside from the growing Muslim population, the expansion is fuelled by the increasing awareness in consuming halal product, economic growth and increase in disposable income among Muslim population [2, 3]. Even though religion still plays the most important part in Muslim's food decision making, the changes in their lifestyles, attitude, taste and sociocultural variables like education and income level have resulted a shift in their preferences towards food [4, 5]. Muslim consumers are also becoming more techno-savvy and have access to unlimited information [6], hence becoming smarter, knowledgeable and cautious in their purchase choice and decision. These changes were seen as the cause of increasing demand in higher quality, healthy, safe, natural, convenience and even environmental friendly halal food products [5, 7].

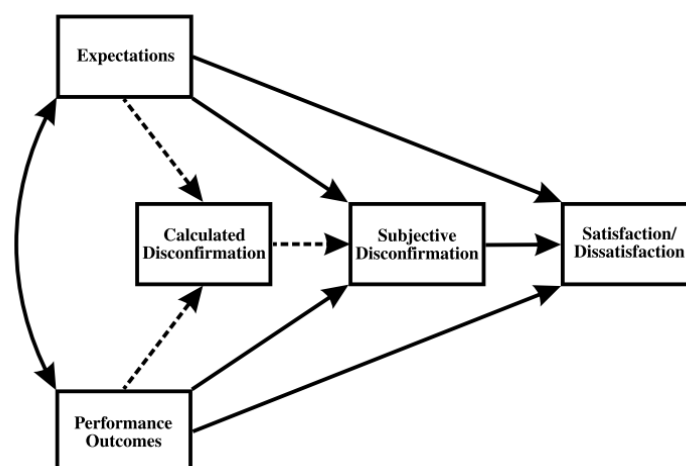
However, recent studies claimed that local halal products especially from the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are still unable to fulfil consumer demand and lacking especially in term of quality, labelling, packaging [8, 9] and also in term of popularity [10]. Aside from the weaknesses mentioned, halal food industry in Malaysia also lack of the ability to identify what consumer wants in term of taste and preferences [11]. There

are also never ending issues concerning halal logo authenticity, halal food adulteration [12], usage of unrecognized halal certification on a product [13] and hygiene violation reported [14]. This is a very concerning issue since having a product that meets customer expectation is crucial for the success and survival of a business in the competitive halal market. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the performance of halal food product which in this case, SMEs Halal confectionery product has met Muslim consumer expectation. As majority of the food producers in Malaysia comprises of SMEs, there is an increasing effort from the government and its agencies to improve SMEs halal products, making it imperative to understand the component in need of progress based on consumer need. Whereas, confectionery products were chosen to be the focus of this study considering the potential of this product and also high competition faced by this category from the multinational and also imported brands. As urbanization continues to expand in Malaysia, the substantial young population has influenced the innovation and provided growth opportunities in the confectionery industry. It is expected that the confectionery market will register marginally higher growth in value terms during 2015-2020 compared to 2010-2015 [15]. However, impulse and indulgence products in Malaysia are mainly dominated by multinational players and consumers in Malaysia are revealed to prefer strongly established confectionery brand names such as Nestlé and Cadbury [16]. Confectionery products were also chosen as it is more subjected to contain high-risk halal ingredients such as food additives. Some issues have also been reported in regard to contamination by porcine DNA in halal confectionery products category [17]. Thus, getting consumer responses in this particular sector will be a great contribution to the industry and literature.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

In this research, the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) introduced by Oliver [30] was adopted to explore and describe consumers' satisfaction with the halal food product within the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm. This theory conceptualizes that customer anticipates certain level of service or products performance prior to consumption, and when the actual consumption take place, customer then form perception on the actual performance of the product or service. When the initial expectation and perceived performance was compared, it results on a state called disconfirmation, which in turn will influence overall satisfaction [31]. Expectation represent an anticipated performance of a product or service, which is believe to be developed based on customer's prior experiences of consuming similar product, product information learned from customer's surrounding, attributes of products claimed by the producer, or word-of-mouth [31, 32]. Perceived performance, labelled in Fig. 1 as performance outcome, refers to customer evaluation of recent consumption experience. While the discrepancy between consumer expectation and product perceived performance is known as disconfirmation [33]. It is negatively disconfirmed when a product had lower performance than expected and positively confirmed when a product performs above standard. Meanwhile, satisfaction is defined by [31] as the consumer's fulfilment response on whether a product or service features provided a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment.



**Figure 1. The Complete Expectancy Disconfirmation with Performance Model (Source: [31], p. 120)**

### 2.2 Determinants of Halal Food Products

For the purpose of this study, attributes reported in the literature as factors that influence purchasing decision, confidence, and market acceptance of halal food products [18, 4, 19] were identified and concluded as

the determinants of halal food products. Among the attributes mentioned are related to 'Quality', 'Hygiene and Safety', 'Halalness', 'Packaging', 'Labeling', and 'Marketing'.

'Food Quality' is described as the degree to which all the established specification concerning the attributes of the food is fulfilled [20]. The common examples of quality attributes of food are appearance, taste, aroma, texture and fitness for consumption [20]. Halal quality on the other hand is said to be constructed by socio-technical criterion which not only bounded by legislative requirements but also dietary laws, values and religion to form ideal quality product [21]. In the holy book of Quran, Allah s.w.t had also commands for Muslim to take halal and good quality food and avoid impure and harmful food since what is beneficial for the body is also good for mind and spirit [22].

'Food safety' is an assurance that when food is consumed according to its conditions of use, it will not cause injury or harmful to health [20]. Within the context of halal, safe and hygienic food is not any difference from the general food safety and hygiene concept. In Islam, food is considered as halal, safe and hygienic if it is free from filth, dirt, contamination or pathogenic germs and at the same time prepared in accordance to halal requirements [23].

'Halal' is a credence attribute, it is a quality attributes that is not visible and the "halalness" of food cannot be evaluated by the consumer even post-consumption. Characteristically, halal entails the origin, nature and the method of the food production [24]. As these characteristics cannot be seen by the consumer, sometimes it generates uncertainty to consumer at the point of purchasing and consumption of halal product. Therefore, while purchasing halal food, consumer wholly rely on halal logo, product observation and also information provided by producer such as label to assess the halalness [18, 25].

'Packaging' is a material that is used to pack, protect and handle food product [25]. In reference to halal products, a research conducted by [26] showed Muslim customer regarded product packaging as one of the main factors in Halal product brand marketing. Nonetheless, studies had reported weakness in halal food product packaging such as inability to protect the shelf life of the food [11]. Other than that, it is also important for halal food product, to have a packaging that is durable and able to protect the product as it can minimize the chances of cross contamination between Halal and non-halal food products, thus protecting the purity of the product.

'Label' is one of the external stimuli which can be used as a decision making tool during packaged food products purchasing. According to [5], food labelling was found to be one of the influential factors in Malaysian consumers' purchasing decision. Specifically, most attention is given to halal logo, list of ingredients and nutrition label. Since halal logo is set as the priority in Muslim consumers' food purchasing decision, it is important to ensure that the placement, colour, size, and format of the logo can be easily seen and will not cause any suspicion. In some cases, halal food producers also failed to be transparent in labelling as they were unable to provide details on the source of ingredients [27].

'Marketing' for halal food product is very much similar to marketing of other food product, and very much depends on the marketing mix which is the product itself, place, price structure and promotional activities. In the case of halal product, in a research by [28] it is revealed that young consumers think that halal food product should be promoted regularly on the media and they agreed that advertisement gives them awareness and information on halal product. In halal food product market, price is also found to be one of the determining factors in influencing Muslim consumer halal product choice along with taste, quality and packaging [29].

### **III. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Sampling**

The target respondents for this study were young consumers of SMEs halal confectionery products in the area of Klang Valley, Malaysia. Since the population of the consumer is unknown and no sampling frame is available, a non-probability sampling technique was utilized. The non-probability design that was used in this research is purposive sampling. In order to reach the customers of SME halal confectionery product effectively, the respondents were approached either in a shopping mall, public spaces or any places in the vicinity of confectionery products' point-of-sale like supermarket, hypermarket or shop lots. Voluntary respondents then have to fulfill the purposive sampling need of this study: (i) they must be Muslim, and (ii) they have consumed SMEs halal confectionery products more than once before, and (iii) aged below 40 years old. In total, 450 consumers of SMEs halal confectionery products across Klang Valley area were approached and had been asked to fill out the survey form. From the number, 429 questionnaires were returned, accounting for 93.26% of response rate. However, from the returned questionnaire only 390 forms were usable and 39 had to be rejected due to missing data and extreme outliers detected from the normality test.

#### **3.2 Measures**

A self-administered questionnaire was used for the data collection. The instrument contained multi-item scales adopted from previous literature which were then modified to fit the context of the study. The

questionnaire consists of three sections: Section A (Expectation), Section B (Perception on Perceived Performance), and Section C (Consumer Demographic). Except for demographic attributes, all of the constructs were measured using 5 items Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree). Section A and B were designed based on the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory which uses the comparison of pre-consumption experience and post-consumption experience with a product to examine the disconfirmation [30]. In the first section, the respondents were asked to indicate their expectation towards the products based on 45 attributes identified as satisfaction drivers and acceptance factors for halal food products. Meanwhile on the next section, they were asked to evaluate the performance of the products against the same attributes. The attributes include food quality, food safety, hygiene, labeling, packaging, halalness and marketing aspects of the products.

#### IV. Results and discussion

##### 4.1 Respondents' Demographic

**Table 1. Respondent's socio-demographic profiles**

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
20 and below	91	23.3
21 – 30	210	53.8
31 – 40	89	22.8
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	140	35.9
Female	250	64.1
<b>Education</b>		
Primary School	4	1.0
Secondary School	81	20.8
Diploma	91	23.3
Degree	172	44.1
Postgraduate	42	10.8
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
No Income	190	48.7
1500 and below	64	16.4
1501 – 3000	66	16.9
3001 – 4500	38	9.7
4501 – 6000	16	4.1
6001 and above	16	4.1
<b>Present Occupation</b>		
Professional	125	32.1
Non-professional	41	10.5
Self-employed	25	6.4
Student	186	47.7
Unemployed	13	3.3

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study are shown in Table 1. From the total of 390 respondents, majority of them were between 21 and 30 years old. There were also more female (64.1%) than male respondents (35.9%) who participated in this survey. Substantial portion of the respondents were degree holders (44.2%) followed by diploma holders (23.3%). About half of the respondents had no income (48.7%) since majority of them were still students (47.7%).

##### 4.2 Consumers' Expectation, Perceived Performance and Disconfirmation

To measure whether consumer expectation towards SMEs halal food products has been met, the disconfirmation or gap between consumer expectation and perceived performance were calculated using inferred approach (subtractive approach). In this method, the mean of expectation is subtracted from the mean of perceived performance to form disconfirmation value [33]. The following formula depicts the calculation used in this study:

$$\text{Disconfirmation} = \text{Mean of Perceived Performance} - \text{Mean of Expectation}$$

**Table 2. Consumer expectation and perceived performance of SMEs halal confectionery products**

DETERMINANTS		EXPECTATIONS		PERFORMANCE		GAP
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	Quality (High Quality)	4.26	.739	3.80	.864	-0.46
2	Quality (Tasty)	4.35	.692	3.91	.782	-0.44
3	Quality (Quality Ingredient)	4.23	.792	3.73	.881	-0.51
4	Quality (Texture)	4.23	.739	3.82	.779	-0.41
5	Quality (Appearances)	4.14	.750	3.73	.834	-0.41
6	Quality (Aroma)	4.21	.753	3.86	.772	-0.35
7	Quality (Fit for Consumption)	4.50	.632	4.14	.714	-0.36
8	Safety (Quality Assurance's Certificate)	4.45	.689	3.88	.880	-0.57
9	Safety (Safe Ingredient)	4.60	.653	4.04	.820	-0.56
10	Safety (Clean)	4.64	.588	4.09	.800	-0.55
11	Safety (Healthy)	4.25	.820	3.65	.946	-0.60
12	Safety (Fresh)	4.35	.780	3.77	.906	-0.58
13	Safety (Not Contaminated)	4.55	.646	4.00	.797	-0.55
14	Safety (Traceability)	4.19	.791	3.80	.908	-0.40
15	Safety (Safe for Consumption)	4.63	.636	4.11	.789	-0.52
16	Packaging (Attractive)	4.00	.764	3.56	.884	-0.44
17	Packaging (Technology)	3.94	.768	3.54	.908	-0.41
18	Packaging (Longer Shelf Life)	4.23	.737	3.73	.924	-0.50
19	Packaging (Environmentally Friendly)	4.06	.857	3.55	1.015	-0.51
20	Packaging (Appropriate Image)	4.30	.808	4.04	.802	-0.26
21	Packaging (Islamic Feature)	3.86	.971	3.79	.915	-0.07
22	Packaging (Protective)	4.41	.721	3.89	.876	-0.51
23	Labelling (JAKIM Logo)	4.49	.791	3.98	.894	-0.51
24	Labelling (Display Ingredient)	4.44	.696	3.91	.906	-0.53
25	Labelling (Informative Labelling)	4.40	.723	3.85	.950	-0.55
26	Labelling (Clear Logo)	4.58	.661	3.99	.929	-0.59
27	Labelling (Logo not Doubtful)	4.52	.723	3.97	.905	-0.55
28	Labelling (Official Logo Format)	4.62	.645	4.06	.944	-0.56
29	Labelling (Nutritional Labelling)	4.38	.680	3.97	.915	-0.41
30	Labelling (Simple Terminology)	4.32	.759	3.89	.841	-0.43
31	Labelling (Ingredient Writing)	4.43	.747	3.97	.854	-0.46
32	Halalness (No Doubtful Ingredient)	4.56	.641	4.04	.842	-0.53
33	Halalness (Confidence And Trust)	4.63	.597	4.08	.821	-0.55
34	Halalness (Psychological Comfort)	4.53	.663	4.02	.822	-0.51
35	Halalness (Segregation)	4.53	.708	4.11	.799	-0.42
36	Halalness (No Misconduct)	4.55	.689	4.09	.782	-0.46
37	Halalness (Halalan Toyyiban)	4.62	.642	4.14	.805	-0.48
38	Marketing (Advertisement on Halalness)	4.18	.793	3.72	.980	-0.47
39	Marketing (Product Variety)	4.19	.781	3.74	.950	-0.45
40	Marketing (Promotion)	4.18	.797	3.70	.978	-0.48
41	Marketing (Price)	4.40	.698	3.90	.879	-0.50
42	Marketing (Attractive Product)	4.19	.766	3.77	.917	-0.42
43	Marketing (Availability)	4.38	.731	3.79	.953	-0.58
44	Marketing (Advertisement In Muslim Medium)	4.26	.819	3.84	901	-0.42
45	Marketing (Consumer Preferences)	4.36	.728	3.92	.886	-0.44
	Overall mean of 45 attributes	<b>4.36</b>		<b>3.89</b>		<b>-.47</b>

Table 2 reveals the descriptive analysis on customer expectation and perceived performance, along with the disconfirmation value calculated using the subtractive approach, labelled as gap. In this study, expectation is conceptualized as performance anticipated by the customer, which means what attributes the customer wish the product to possess, whereas perceived performance is the respondent evaluation on the recent consumption experience based on the attributes listed. As mentioned in previous section, both variables were measured using a five point Likert scale, therefore, the higher the number, the greater the customers' expectation and perceived performance on SMEs halal confectionery products. As shown in Table 2, it can be seen that for all attributes, expectation yielded higher mean scores compared to performance, signalling that all attributes experienced negative disconfirmation. This result suggested that SMEs Halal confectionery products are unable to meet customers' expectation.

The lowest mean score amongst the expectation attributes was the 'Islamic Feature' of the product, which can be interpreted that according to the customer, the attribute was the least anticipated feature that they want SMEs halal confectionery products to possess. This might be due to Muslim consumer increased

confidence and trust in halal logo [28]. As a result, they perceive features that can symbolize the halalness of a product, for example Islamic or Malay brand name is not really necessary. Similarly, in a study by [4], it was reported that majority of their respondents perceived that Arabic and Malay brand name does not signify product's halalness. On the other hand, customers' placed their highest expectation on the attribute 'Clean' which means compared to other attributes cleanliness is the feature that they want SMEs Halal confectionery product to possess the most. This is expected since cleanliness is one of the food safety criteria and important aspects in food consumption choice, and halal products have always been recognized as a symbol of cleanliness and safety [23].

The lowest mean score for perceived performance variable was 'Packaging Technology' attribute. This result suggests that consumer did not highly perceive that SMEs halal confectionery products' packaging of being up-to-date with the current trend in product packaging technology. Packaging is very important for a halal food product as it is used not only to attract consumer but also to protect the product and to ensure the food is still at the optimum quality towards the point of consumption. However, lack of capital and technology, especially in SMEs [9], are some of the barriers that hinder them from using the newest packaging technology. In contrast, respondent's highest perception on performance was on 'Fit for Consumption' attribute, which means respondents strongly agreed that SMEs halal confectionery products were fit for consumption. [20] in his book listed fitness for human consumption as one of the quality characteristics of food. The fact that this attribute was perceived as the highest in performance is assuring since that means this product met the requirement related to its intended use and deemed as suitable for consumption.

**Table 3. SMEs Halal confectionery attributes from the highest to the lowest disconfirmation values**

<b>Attributes with the biggest gaps</b>		<b>Gap</b>
1	Safety (Healthy)	-0.60
2	Labelling (Clear Logo)	-0.59
3	Marketing (Availability)	-0.58
4	Safety (Fresh)	-0.58
5	Safety (Quality Assurance's Certificate)	-0.57
<b>Attributes with the smallest gaps</b>		<b>Gap</b>
1	Safety (Traceability)	-0.40
2	Quality (Fit for Consumption)	-0.36
3	Quality (Aroma)	-0.35
4	Packaging (Appropriate Image)	-0.26
5	Packaging (Islamic Feature)	-0.07

Table 3 shows the attributes with biggest gaps and smallest gaps. The attributes with the biggest disconfirmation value (gap) was 'Healthy' attribute of the product at -0.60. This indicates that customers anticipated a healthier confectionery than what was being produced by the SMEs. This might be due to the increasing awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyle and eating that heavily changed consumer preference in food consumption [16]. This might be the biggest challenge for producer considering the nature of the confectionery product. Nonetheless, some product improvements could be done is by modifying the formulation of the product so that it contains less unhealthy ingredients like sugar or fat, artificial colouring or flavouring, or by introducing confectionery with added health benefit. The smallest disconfirmation was on product 'Islamic Feature' at -0.07, which is almost close to positive disconfirmation. This suggest that manufacturer almost fulfilled the expectation that consumer had towards this feature. As mentioned earlier this attribute recorded the lowest consumer expectation level (M=3.86) among all of the attributes listed.

## V. Conclusion

To sum up, the findings revealed that in overall SMEs Halal confectionery products' did not meet their customers' expectation for all listed attributes. The attribute deemed to be the one that did not meet with customer expectation the most is the product's 'Healthy' attribute meanwhile the product's 'Islamic Feature' was the closest in meeting customers expectation. In regards to expectation, customers put the highest expectation on product cleanliness and the lowest expectation on the product's Islamic features. Customer perceived the products packaging technology to be the lowest in term of performance, meanwhile they highly agreed that the products are fit for consumption. The results were expected since recent research conducted on halal food product especially from SMEs also reported that the products were still lacking in various aspects including product attractiveness, labelling, packaging and popularity [8, 9, 11]. Therefore, constant innovation and improvement are needed as young Muslim consumers are proven to prefer a brand that offers values beyond the halal aspects but without losing the integrity of halal. Being able to meet consumer expectation is essential as satisfaction is the antecedent of positive post-purchase behavioural intention which can ultimately increases future revenue and business performance.

This research contributes to the theoretical advancement by providing new and unique empirical data

on several dimensions of consumer behaviour which haven't been explored under the continuum of halal food products studies before. However, there are limitations to the study itself. The first limitation is related to the sample size, in which compared to the number of population, the small sample size of this study may not be adequate to represent the characteristics of the population. So, it is recommended that the sample size for any future study to be increased or the data collection is expanded throughout the country to increase the generalizability of the results. Moreover, this study was only able to assess consumer perception in regards to one specific product, which is confectionery. Therefore, it is recommended that future research on other halal food product category such as bakery, frozen food, meat or even food service such as casual dining can become the focus of the study.

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